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**SECOND DEFENDANT PLEADS GUILTY  
IN CASE INVOLVING SCHEME TO SELL VISAS**

SACRAMENTO--McGregor W. Scott, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of California, and Christopher A. Wray, Assistant Attorney General for the Criminal Division of the U.S. Department of Justice, announced today that RACHHPAL SINGH, 32, formerly of Union City, and now of Newark, California, pleaded guilty in U.S. District Court in Sacramento to one count of conspiring to defraud the United States, to bribe State Department officials and to commit visa fraud. SINGH, who agreed to cooperate with the Government's investigation, was the second defendant to plead guilty in the case. He faces a maximum penalty of up to five years in prison, a three year term of supervised release, and a fine of \$250,000. Sentencing is scheduled for December 5, 2003.

Six other defendants who were charged in an indictment filed May 1, 2003, appeared before U.S. District Court Judge Garland E. Burrell for further proceedings in the case. Defendants ACEY R. JOHNSON, 32, who was until recently a Consular Associate employed in the consular section of the U.S. Embassy in Sri Lanka; his spouse LONG N. LEE, a State Department Foreign Service Officer and career State Department employee; VINESH PRASAD, 33; and MINESH PRADAD, 28, both of Sacramento, are all in federal custody. Defendants NARINDERJIT SINGH BHULLAR, 40, of Sacramento, and PHUONG-HIEN LAM TRINH, 35, of Torrance, California, were previously released on bail. The eighth defendant, defendant RAJWANT VIRK, of Herndon, Virginia previously entered a guilty plea. A ninth defendant is a fugitive.

According to a complaint unsealed April 29, 2003, the defendants were allegedly involved in a scheme in which JOHNSON and LEE took hundreds of thousands of dollars in bribes between 2000 and 2003 in exchange for the issuance of visas to various foreign nationals, primarily from Vietnam and India. In his plea of guilty, SINGH admitted that starting in or about 2001, he became aware of Indian foreign nationals who wished to obtain visas to enter the United States and were willing to pay large amounts of money for these visas. Between approximately 2001 and February, 2003, co-conspirator MINESH PRASAD informed SINGH that MINESH PRASAD and others knew people on the "inside" of the U.S. Embassy in Sri Lanka who would issue visas in exchange for substantial bribe payments and that he and other

conspirators could obtain visas in this way. SINGH then referred foreign nationals to PRASAD, providing the latter with identifying information for each foreign national. This information was subsequently conveyed to other conspirators including conspirators VINESH PRASAD and JOHNSON, who coordinated the logistics for issuance of visas. MINESH PRASAD gave SINGH instructions, which he in turn gave to the foreign nationals or those sponsoring the foreign national, as to when and where the foreign national would need to go in Sri Lanka in order to receive a visa. The foreign nationals subsequently traveled to Sri Lanka. Conspirator JOHNSON issued visas to these individuals while they were in Sri Lanka. The foreign nationals or their sponsors then paid SINGH. SINGH retained a portion of the payment and delivered the remaining portion to conspirator MINESH PRASAD. The remaining proceeds were subsequently distributed among other conspirators, including conspirators VINESH PRASAD, JOHNSON and LEE.

In addition to a conspiracy charged against all defendants, several of the defendants are charged with wire fraud, bribery, visa fraud, and other felony offenses. The case is being prosecuted in U.S. District Court in Sacramento by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Benjamin B. Wagner and S. Robert Tice-Raskin of the U.S. Attorney's Office, and Trial Attorney Noah D. Bookbinder of the Public Integrity Section, headed by Noel L. Hillman, Chief. The case is the product of an extensive investigation conducted by the Diplomatic Security Service of the U.S. Department of State, and by agents with the FBI and several other state and federal agencies associated with the Joint Terrorism Task Force for the Eastern District of California, including the California Bureau of Investigation, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, and the Bureau of Immigration Control and Enforcement of the Department of Homeland Security. Sri Lankan law enforcement authorities also provided assistance in the investigation.

The United States Attorney's Office noted that the complaint and indictment are only accusations, and that the defendants are presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty.

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